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IRELAND'S INDUSTRIAL REVIVAL.

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AGRICULTURE.

THE following article tells the story of a nation's industrial decline and fall; also of a movement for the revival of a nation's prosperity, which, judged by either its avowed objects or its accomplished results, possesses the strongest claims upon the sympathy and good will of the greatest industrial nation of the world.

The awakening of a spirit of manly independence and self-reliance, the development of the country's resources, the revival and promotion of trade and industry, the preservation and retention of the people on the land given them by God, the unification of all creeds and classes for the benefit of the community, and the abolition of sectarian ill-feeling—such are the main characteristics of the new industrial movement in Ireland.

The reader will observe that no mention of politics occurs in this table of aims. That is because, since the question relates solely to industrial and commercial concerns, an identity of interest exists among all sections of the people that necessarily excludes the introduction of political and controversial subjects in every shape and form.

To understand thoroughly the present position and needs of Ireland as a commercial country, it will be necessary to recall a few facts which have not, until recently, been brought prominently under the notice of the public, and which in consequence have not been invested with their due significance.

The Irish question should be divided into two phases—the political and the economical.

The various developments of Irish politics have commanded the close attention of the world at large; the material condition and the economic necessities of the Irish people have received but scant consideration, even from some of her staunchest champions.

At the same time, it is of the greatest importance to recognize

the fact that the possibility of separate consideration of the economical, as distinguished from the political, aspect of Irish affairs, has only arisen within what may be termed, from a historical standpoint, a comparatively recent date.

At the commencement of the nineteenth century, the extirpation of Irish industries was part of the policy of the British Government, due to the fear of Irish competition entertained by English merchants.

The following propositions may be accepted as representing facts authenticated by the testimony of witnesses who certainly cannot be accused of excessive sympathy or undue partiality for the Irish people.

(1.) Ireland, with her excellent natural resources, was at one time a formidable rival to Great Britain in commerce and manufactures. In the language of the report of the Recess Committee, "In every branch of industry, including the smelting of iron, was this competition manifested." "The maintenance of such a rivalry shows that the Irish people once exhibited a high capacity for industrial enterprise, and the Recess Committee believes that that capacity may again be brought into productive activity."

(2.) Legislation was purposely framed by the British Parliament to stamp out this competition and to suppress industries. Again to quote the Recess Committee: "This legislation really left Ireland no chance. It struck at all her industries, not excepting agriculture. It forced the population into entire dependence on the land and reduced the country to an economic condition involving periodical famines. It is not to be wondered at that we at length came to have a population devoid of the industrial spirit. As Lord Dufferin has put it, 'even the traditions of commercial enterprise have perished through desuetude.' Mr. Arthur Balfour, speaking at Alnwick on July 19th, 1895, said that he had learned while he was in Ireland that many of the ills of the country arose from its poverty, and that this poverty was in part the work of England and Scotland."

In support of the contentions above set forth, the following extracts from various authorities may be quoted concerning the restrictive legislation enacted at the close of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries:

"The mere rumors of a rise of industry in Ireland created a panic in the commercial circles in England.*

* Froude. "English in Ireland." Vol. I., p. 443.

"The commercial leaders were possessed of a terror of Irish rivalry which could not be exorcised."*

"The Navigation Laws prohibited the importation of Irish cattle into England as a public and common nuisance. Irish beef, pork, bacon, butter and cheese were likewise excluded. The growth of our great woollen trade was the result of these agricultural restrictions, the people, by the advice of the Duke of Ormonde, who introduced Walloon families to teach them weaving, turning their attention to sheep.

"This trade having in turn been destroyed, the undertaking of Parliament to encourage the linen trade as a compensation was not kept. The Irish glass trade was ruined by the 19th of George II. Irish cottons were crushed by an import duty of 25 per cent. At one time Ireland was making sails for the entire British navy. This trade was put an end to by imposing duties on sail cloth made of Irish hemp.

"Irish beer, malt, hats, gunpowder, coals, bar iron, ironware and other products were likewise the subject of legislative restrictions. The removal in 1800 of the bounties and protective duties by which the Irish Parliament sought to revive industries between the years 1782 and 1798, exposing these infant industries to the competition of the great capital and long established skill and ability of England, and the civil war of 1798, completed our industrial ruin."

"From Queen Elizabeth's reign until within a few years of the Union, the various commercial confraternities of Great Britain never for a moment relaxed their relentless grip on the trades of Ireland. One by one, each of our nascent industries was either strangled in its birth or handed over, gagged and bound, to the jealous custody of the rival interests in England, until, at last, every fountain of wealth was hermetically sealed. What has been the consequence of such a system pursued with relentless pertinacity for over 250 years? This: that, debarred from every other trade and industry, the entire nation flung itself back on 'the land' with a pitiless impulse, as when a river whose current is suddenly impeded rolls back and drowns the valley it once fertilized."†

Until 1782, "annual shiploads of families poured themselves out of Belfast and Londonderry, going mostly to America with resentment in their hearts."‡

Here let us pause. At this point, the story of Ireland's industrial ruin assumes an aspect of close connection with the expansion and grandeur of the American people. How many Presidents, Governors of States, Judges, Generals and prominent men in every rank of life, in the history of the Great Republic, are descendants of those Irish families that annually "poured themselves out of Belfast and Londonderry going to America with resentment in their hearts!"

We must now consider Ireland a purely agricultural country,

* Froude, "English in Ireland," Vol. I., p. 446.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

not only on account of her soil and climate, but also because of the destruction of her other industries. It naturally follows that the prosperity of the country at large depends on the condition of the agricultural community.

Agriculture being practically the sole industrial pursuit left to the country, let us see how the Irish peasant is prepared to contend with his Continental rivals in the markets of the world.

The important question of land tenure, although beyond the scope of this article, cannot be ignored in discussing a question of Irish economics.

By the provisions of the Land Act of 1881 and other Acts, a tenant can apply to the Land Court to "fix his rent." The judicial rent so determined by the Land Court is subject to revision every fifteen years; improvements made by the tenant are supposed to be his own property, and he enjoys fixity of tenure as long as he pays the judicial rent. Questions of law, and of the fairness of the constitution and of the decisions of the Land Courts, are, however, continually arising; and, undoubtedly, the solution of the difficulty is the abolition of the system of dual ownership and the establishment of "peasant proprietorship."

As a matter of fact, the Government, by virtue of the Land Purchase Act of 1885, advances the purchase money to the tenant in the event of the landlord and tenant mutually agreeing to sell and buy respectively, the tenant being required to repay the Government by forty-nine yearly installments, with a low rate of interest.

Agriculture, like all other sciences and pursuits, has advanced with the times; education in modern systems is essential for its proper development; organization and business methods are imperative if its pursuit is to be made lucrative.

No more striking exemplification of the utility and necessity of progressive and scientifically directed effort can be found than in the industrial advancement of Denmark, Ireland's principal rival in the produce markets of Europe.

The population of Denmark is 2,200,000. At the end of the last century it was one of the poorest countries in Europe. To-day, it is one of the richest, and its progress in wealth is almost entirely the result of its progress in agriculture.

The three essential factors in the agricultural progress of Denmark are (1.) the highly trained intelligence, resourcefulness,

adaptability, energy and enterprise of the Danish farmer; (2.) the power which is given the Danish farmers by organization; (3.) the effectiveness with which the Government is enabled, chiefly through organization among the farmers, to come to the assistance of their industry with expert advice, technical instruction, and material support.

Unquestionably, the most potent of these factors in Danish prosperity is the second, the power gained by organization, inasmuch as Danish farmers are banded together in various co-operative, voluntary associations or "trusts" for the promotion and development of their common industries. Statistics prove this conclusively. The value of the butter they exported to the United Kingdom in 1893 was \$24,529,165. In 1899 they exported butter to the United Kingdom to the value of \$38,767,180, an increase in six years of \$14,238,015. From 1898 to 1899 there was an increase in the value of butter exported from Denmark of \$2,778,000; an increase in the value of bacon exported of \$1,250,000; and an increase in the value of eggs exported of \$975,000. The annual export of bacon from Denmark is about 200,000,000 pounds in weight.

Irish products once supplied the demand for the above mentioned articles.

Denmark, France, Holland, Belgium, as well as all other civilized countries, possess elaborate Departments of State for Agriculture and Industries, and a remarkable feature of the operations of these various departments is the close association they keep with the voluntary societies of the farmers; in some instances, indeed, the state aid to agriculture is administered through the voluntary associations.

How did Ireland stand prior to 1888? Ireland possessed no Department of State for Agriculture and Industries; there was no organization among farmers for trading purposes; no combination among them for opening up better markets; there were no incentives and no opportunities for raising a superior grade of farm produce; no systems of improvement; no methods of turning farm produce into money save its disposal at the nearest market for whatever price it would fetch. As a trader, the Irish farmer stood isolated, friendless and alone. Day after day, week after week, year after year, he struggled along without advice or help, tilling his land according to the customs of his fathers, dis-

posing of his farming produce in bad markets for bad prices, fighting the battle of life in a "lone hand" fight.

How could the individual Irish farmer—to say nothing of the handicap imposed upon him by the land tenure system—compete with the powerful, organized, educated and state-aided combinations of French, Danish and Belgian agriculturists? The natural results followed; Ireland's trade withered almost entirely from off the face of the earth and her population dwindled by millions. And the awful emigration drain of the nation's life blood still continues; 42,890 people left Ireland in the year 1900!

The years 1888-1889 saw the introduction and establishment of a great movement for the education, organization and improvement of the farming classes, and for the revival of other industries in Ireland. The Right Honorable Horace Curzon Plunkett had made a systematic study of the economic, educational and trading advantages possessed by other countries, and consequently became impressed with a sense of the urgent necessity that existed for equipping his fellow countrymen with qualifications and methods that would enable them to compete, at least on terms of equality, with their trade rivals.

In the year 1889, Mr. Plunkett founded the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, commonly called the I. A. O. S., for the purpose of introducing the principles of organization and co-operation among Irish farmers.

The I. A. O. S. has now about 500 societies established throughout Ireland, with about 50,000 members representing all creeds and classes of the farming population. The principal functions of its staff are: Organizing voluntary associations among the farmers, such as co-operative creameries, agricultural, poultry, flax and home industry societies, agricultural banks, etc.; guiding and assisting with expert advice the operations of such societies; providing courses of lectures; supplying technical instruction; securing superior marketing facilities; disseminating useful information; creating village libraries; conducting agricultural experiments; and, generally, promoting the interests and raising the status, social and economic, of the farmers of Ireland in every possible manner.

The dairy societies, or, as they are called, co-operative creameries, number 252; the butter sales of these creameries for 1900 amounted to \$3,519,130.

Co-operation as applied to the butter trade means that a body of farmers, with the assistance of the I. A. O. S., form themselves into an association or company, secure a suitable building, furnish it with the very best modern machinery for pasteurizing the milk and making the butter, employ trained butter-makers, supply the milk fresh every morning, control the management of the creamery by a committee chosen by themselves of the best business men among them and, finally, share all the profits of their trading transactions.

As an indication of the wonderful success of the Irish co-operative creamery system, the following extracts are quoted from a newspaper article describing the great English Agricultural Show held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, in October last:

"The exhibits of the Irish co-operative dairies have practically swept the board.

"One of the greatest authorities in England says: 'Three years ago, Irish butter was scarcely fit to eat. To-day, it has attained such a standard and, owing to the methods employed, is so uniform in flavor and type that it can easily compete with the most popular Danish product.' "

So confident are the Irish co-operative people of the excellence of their butter that a \$2,500 challenge has just been issued for a trial test between Irish and Danish butter.

A very important feature of the work of the I. A. O. S. is the establishment of agricultural banks on the plan first introduced into Germany by Dr. Raffeisen in 1849. The system of the agricultural bank may be described shortly as follows: A body of farmers form themselves into a society, and, on their joint security, borrow money from the newly established Department of Agriculture, or from some banking company, at four or five per cent. With the money thus secured, the Committee makes loans to approved applicants at five or six per cent. interest for *productive* purposes only. Until this system was introduced, the poor Irish farmer in need of a little money was obliged to apply to some "gombeen" man, as country money lenders are called, or to some "loan bank," and almost invariably was obliged to pay about thirty per cent. interest on the loan.

All co-operative societies are managed by committees of men who reside in the locality, aided by the best expert advice from the I. A. O. S.

In addition to the material benefits conferred by these so-

cieties, their operations have a great educational effect in all communities where they are established. Farmers learn superior methods and develop business instincts; but, above all the other desirable features possessed by these voluntary associations, undoubtedly their greatest claim for sympathy and admiration is their practical fostering of the great principle of self-help which is their foundation and mainspring.

One of the strictest rules of the co-operative societies is that neither religious nor political affairs shall be introduced, or even adverted to, in connection with the business transacted, and the result of this salutary regulation is to be found in the disappearance of bigotry and intolerance wherever co-operative principles are introduced. Catholics and Protestants work together earnestly and harmoniously for the benefit of the community; and many creameries, especially in the North of Ireland, have been started and organized by the shoulder-to-shoulder exertions of the Catholic priest and the Presbyterian minister.

In the year 1895, Mr. Horace Plunkett organized and convened a committee, consisting of leading Irishmen of all political and religious parties, for the purpose of investigating the economic needs of the country, of ascertaining the superior advantages possessed by other countries, and endeavoring to secure similar advantages for the Irish people by means of the establishment of a state-aided Department of Agriculture and Industries. The investigating body thus constituted was called the Recess Committee, and the result of its labors was the production of a report which is the standard authority on the economic position of Ireland at the present time.

The demand for governmental aid in the effort to develop the resources of Ireland was not long in eliciting a favorable response; indeed, the policy of Mr. A. J. Balfour and of Mr. Gerald Balfour has been, on social and economic questions, a policy of progress and material improvement.

The Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act (Ireland), 1899, established a state Department for Agriculture and Industries, and provided about \$1,000,000 a year for those objects. The expenditure of this money is controlled by two boards, principally consisting of elected representatives, the Board of Agriculture and the Board of Technical Instruction.

A Council of Agriculture, consisting of two representatives

from every county council in Ireland, with additional members nominated by the Department, is also constituted for the purpose of discussing all matters of public interest in connection with any of the purposes of the Act, and advising the Department.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the duties and functions performed by the Department. Among many others we may mention the following schemes already put in operation by the Agricultural Board: The improvement of the breeding of horses, cattle and live stock; the prevention and cure of disease; the proper transit of live stock and farm produce on trains and steamships; the revival and extension of the flax trade; the introduction of superior agricultural education; the collection and publication of statistics; the development of the butter, cheese and bee-keeping industries; the prevention of the ravages of injurious insects; the introduction of better-class seeds and the testing and analysis of same; the dissemination of information by pamphlets, etc.

The establishment of technical schools in the urban districts throughout the country is occupying the attention of the Board of Technical Instruction.

The interests of the sea fisheries are under the control of the Board of Agriculture, and include the construction of piers, the supply of fishing boats and gear, and the encouragement of any industries connected with fishing.

The officials of the Department are always ready and desirous to receive suggestions and assistance of every kind in any of their efforts to introduce improvement.

The adoption of the provisions of the Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act throughout Ireland rests with the local authorities; many of the county councils are adopting systems of employment of itinerant instructors on agricultural subjects, combined with the establishment of experimental plots. Itinerant instructors on the breeding and rearing of poultry are also at work throughout the country. All the county councils of Ireland, save two, have taken advantage of improvement schemes for the breeding of horses, cattle and live stock promulgated by the Department of Agriculture.

The application of the benefits of the Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act is limited by one restriction, but that restriction is in itself the embodiment of a noble principle, the principle of self-help; the Department cannot, except under ex-

ceptional circumstances, apply any of the funds at its disposal for the purposes of the act, to any scheme that is not locally supported. Self-help is the genesis of the voluntary association system, the "condition precedent" to the reception of state aid.

Such is the story of the commercial and industrial downfall of Ireland and its causes, of the revival movement and its methods. We have considered the changing of the old order and the reincarnation of a spirit of manly effort and of progress among her people; we have learned of England's efforts to atone for the cruel wrong done by the extinction of Ireland's industries, and of the provision made for the industrial regeneration of the country; we see convincing proofs that the farmers of Ireland possess intelligence, resourcefulness, adaptability, energy and enterprise when these latent faculties are trained and scientifically developed.

The new movement is founded on common sense and, in its progressive aspect, is in perfect accord with the exigencies of existence in the twentieth century. The difficulties and obstacles that still obstruct the course of progress are great. Ireland's trade rivals have had a long start in the possession of superior methods and educational systems. The measure of success already attained under the new order of things, however, is a forecast of future triumphs.

We may look forward to a day at no very distant date, when Ireland, without negation or abatement of political demands, but with commerce increased, industries revived and trade developed, may take her proper place in the markets of the world with honor to herself and material prosperity among her people.

MICHAEL J. MAGEE.